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COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
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June 24, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin,

I am writing to bring your attention to the collapse of a drop structure on the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system that stopped flows from the St. Mary River that supply the irrigation of 140,000 acres of cropland, 18,000 water users, and municipalities along the Hi-Line, including the Blackfeet Reservation and Fort Belknap. For years, the Montana Delegation has fought for legislation to prevent this very failure from occurring to no avail. Given this catastrophic failure, I respectfully request that S. 1305, the St. Mary's Reinvestment Act, be included in the next Energy and Natural Resources Committee mark-up.

The St. Mary Milk River project's infrastructure is not only among the oldest of Bureau of Reclamation's projects, but also retains one of the highest cost shares for water-users. This unfortunate pairing means that the needs are just as great as they are costly to rural Montanans. In fact, it has been nearly two decades since all five-drop structures of the St. Mary Milk River project were recommended for replacement. While Bureau of Reclamation is working to repair two of these drops in response to the collapse, irrigators are scrambling for funding while knowing if the rest of the system is not replaced soon they could very easily be in the same position next year. The St. Mary's Reinvestment Act adjusts the cost-share making reconstruction economically feasible.

The St. Mary Milk River project has been coined the life-line of the Hi-Line, supplying up to 90% of water for the Milk River Basin during a dry year and providing food for over one million people. Reliable water infrastructure is critical for rural economies, recreation, wildlife habitat, and irrigation. I ask for your help in securing quick consideration and passage of this important Montana priority. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator